New Fiction

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A MORE HONORABLE MAN. By Arthur Somers Roche. The Macmillan Company.

MR. ROCHE has set himself a huge task in this and although he attains a large measure of success—quite enough to make it a very noteworthy book of more than passing interest and importance—it yet leaves one with the feeling that the subject exceeds the compass of the story and sticks, awkwardly, out of it, around the edges. Perhaps it is too big to be compressed into any single novel. As Mr. Roche himself warns us, at the very outset, "One is not conscious of one's limitations in dealing with a personality, no matter how overwhelming it may be. But with an era, an epoch, it is different. Time itself brings no solution of the riddles of the past; how shall one attempt to solve the riddles of the present?" Yet he valiantly makes the attempt, in this study of the transition age in America, from the life of 1890 (taken as an arbitrary starting point) down to the present. It is a thoughtful book, solidly meaty with suggestion and, considering the vast difficulties involved in his plan, it is strikingly comprehensive. If it still leaves a good deal to be said and much room for argument, or even disagreement with its doctrines, that is no doubt inevitable in the very nature of it.

Examined primarily as a work of literary art, it is excellently built so far as its dramatic and narrative elements go. It moves with a fine sweep and its action is logical, always well motivated. But it is sometimes annoyingly overmannered, a little too frankly self-conscious in its art and sometimes a little too insistent on minor detail. For instance, one tires a little of the repetition of "Uncle Frank's" skill in spitting his tobacco juice over the rail. It is amusing and illuminative for a while, but he does it too often. A more serious fault lies in the fact that nearly all the characters are, as Mr. Roche himself admits, more personifications than personalities. "The Magnificent," otherwise Mr. Jameson Briggs Willoughby, is not so much a man as a walking idea. And there is always a distinct loss not only in dramatic quality but in truthfulness in such schematic characters. Mr. Roche is conscious of this. He explains:

> "The Magnificent, then, represents an era; he is no personality, although he eats and drinks and sleeps and loves and hates as Napoleon doubtless did. . . . We are not attempting biography; we are attempting history . . . . Yet, if we could make The Magnificent clear, could define him with his proper lights and shadows, we might get nearer to the goal of 'What's-it-all-about?'"

And he does succeed, remarkably, in spite of the partial qualification just noted. He is even more successful with The Magnificent than with the other, also typical, characters.

The story follows the parallel careers of two young men, from that day in 1890 when they are in the middle twenties down to to-day. Willoughby is vehemently called a "yeller skunk" by Uncle Frank, the fat and philosophic hotelkeeper, but even that severe critic soon sees reason to modify that verdict. He is not at all that kind of animal, though he is far from faultless. But he is a personification of efficiency, and we watch him grow from the ownership of a small bicycle factory to vast wealth, first in making bicycles and then in seeing, at an early date, the coming of the automobile. He also sees the possibilities of the cheap automobile and ends by becoming the "richest man in America—in all the world." Naturally this implies a certain hardness. At an early stage of his larger success, after he has "pulled off" a colossal bluff by which he clears millions, he complains to his wife, Ramsey—"Any one would think, to listen to you, that I'd done something dishonest." To which she replies, "Haven't you?" And that is the thing in a nut shell; not exactly dishonest in a narrow legalistic sense but none the less a straining of the highest moralities.

But he is no big business robber. At the end Uncle Frank can say, truthfully: "He's done more than make a fortune; he's been of service to the community, the nation and the world. . . . It ain't the hoarding of money that's wrong, it's the hoarding of opportunity. . . . Some men refrain from offering opportunity. Jim ain't that kind," as he demonstrates by creating a vast educational foundation, a brand new college for his native town. The various implications and deductions are obvious enough.

Contrasted to him, throughout, is his friend, Sam Foyle, who might, perhaps, have done as well as Jim had he wanted to, but whose service is selfless and without tangible reward. Ramsey, whom he has loved but who has not returned that love, sums it all up, after Sam's death—"There are two kinds of service. One takes payment and the other refuses it. . . . Oh, if Jim had only had the eyes of Sam! If Jim had had Sam's heart!" . . . Possibly that was asking for an impossible combination, but if the book has a moral it is that such a fusion ought to be possible.

Space lacks for any detailed examination of the political and business philosophy implied in these two men's lives. But the reader may be assured that it is well worth studying.

HENRY WALKER.

GLINT OF WINGS. By Cleveland Moffett and Virginia Hall. The James A. McCann Company.

THE authors of "Glint of Wings" have used the penchant of the modern woman for liberty to attract readers to a novel whose appeal rather thinly disguises a mediocre and altogether

Cleveland Moffett.

undistinguished piece of writing. Patricia Lydig is the daughter of a successful American novelist, whose brushes with the Bohemian in life have failed to remove his strong predilection in favor of convention and guarding his daughter against the mistakes into which he fears her desire for freedom to do as she pleases will lead her. His intervention brings on the inevitable—she elopes with a "movie" star, leaves him, and finds her true mate in an officer of the French army, who turns out to be a rather decent sort of chap, unable, because of his religion, to marry a divorced woman. Patricia returns to her parents and finally joins her husband in the thrilling climax to a story which has been melodramatic and sentimental in the extreme.

The saving grace of the entire novel is Patricia as a diarist. She is one of those rare persons who keep consistent journals of the day's happenings, and though the girl is torn by the greatest of emotions, though she is disillusioned and swept to the verge of brain fever, still she sits at her desk to commit a full account of her emotions to the diary. A great deal of the story of the book is told in this way, and when the reader is interested in an active furthering of the narrative he is forced to content himself with the second hand information which Patricia's journal affords. Besides the diary there are other rather ridiculous little interludes—dialogues between Patricia and "Woozy." It is explained that the heroine has two selves, and "Woozy" is the more Puritanical, conventional counterpart of the impulsive Patricia. "Stan" Matthews, movie star, is the sort of red blooded virile hero with whom, of necessity, such a girl as the heroine must be in love. It is he who forms the bulwark of her life and to him she finally turns. The book as a whole belongs to a bygone era of hero worship and sentimentality from which even its modern appeal of feminine freedom fails to drag it.

STEWART T. BEACH.

QUEST. By Helen R. Hull. The Macmillan Company.

MISS HULL shows herself so good an artist and the story is so honest, so tempestuously sincere, so almost whimsically righteous when she touches—reluctantly, but firmly—upon the woeful filth of life that the reviewer is tempted simply to applaud and wish more power to her already highly efficient elbow. But one must also whimper a small protest, for though it ends upon a hopeful note it is almost too eloquent a preaching of the gospel of unhappiness. One is minded to ejaculate—"the melancholy Brontes are come again," with the weepings of hard, inward tears of "Wuthering Heights" and

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